

## **Proper Destruction of Records**

Virtually all agencies require the sanction of an official retention schedule prior to the destruction of public records.

Indiana Code 5-15-5.1-14 states:

A public official or agency may not mutilate, destroy, sell, loan, or otherwise dispose of any government record, except under a record retention schedule or with the written consent of the commission [i.e., Commission on Public Records].

## **Record Retention Schedule**

A record retention schedule formally describes the contents of a record series and sets rules for its disposition. A record series consists of records that have the same physical form, are arranged under a single filing system, are related to a particular subject, document a particular transaction or are produced by the same activity, and so form an identifiable group.

## **Destruction Options**

When a retention schedule indicates that the records it governs are due to be destroyed, an agency has two options: it can either destroy the records in-house or contact the Records Center, which destroys records as a service to all state agencies. The preferred method of destruction for most records is recycling. According to IC 5-15-5.1-13, though, confidential records must be destroyed in such a manner that they cannot be "read, interpreted or reconstructed." The Records Center can destroy both ordinary and confidential records in the approved fashions.

## **Calculating When Records are Eligible for Destruction**

To calculate the date records are eligible for destruction, start with the date of the latest records and add the time period specified in the retention schedule. Take, for example, General Correspondence (GRADM-4 on the General Retention Schedule), which can be destroyed after three (3) years. If the latest correspondence is December 31, 1987, then the records may be destroyed on January 1, 1991.

## **Records Destruction Notification Form (SF 16)**

To initiate the destruction of records, complete a Records Destruction Notification form. These are available from the Forms Distribution Center. As retention schedules grant agencies the authority to destroy certain records after a specified time period, it is not necessary to obtain permission from the Commission on Public Records each time scheduled records are due for destruction. It is necessary, however, to notify the ICPR that the records were destroyed in order to be able to satisfy any later request for an audit trail.

Complete all required entries on the Records Destruction Notification form, especially those that note the dates of the records and the precise date they were destroyed. It is extremely important to use the Record Series Title and Record Series Number exactly as they appear on the retention schedule, since it may be necessary to establish at a later date that the records were destroyed legally. The Destruction Notification must be signed and dated by the agency's records coordinator. Only original Records Destruction Notification forms should be submitted. Photocopies are not acceptable.

## **Destruction of Records by the Records Center**

To ask the Records Center to destroy records, complete the Records Destruction Notification form as instructed above. If the records in question are deemed confidential, write "Confidential" in the "method of destruction" blank and send the completed form to an ICPR records management analyst. After review, the request will be forwarded to the Records Center. The Records Center staff will arrange to pick up the records from the agency.

To prepare records for Records Center destruction, place them in properly labeled one cubic foot boxes. Unless instructed otherwise, it is not necessary to segregate colored paper, file folders, or other material from the files before loading the records into the boxes.

To avoid confusion, all records picked up for destruction by the Records Center staff must have proper box labels. Labels may be obtained from the Forms Distribution Center, Dept. Of Administration. Enter the Record Series number and Record Series Title on the label exactly as they appear on the retention schedule. Use the retention schedule and the dates of the records to calculate the destruction date for the box.

For further information, contact:

**Commission on Public Records**  
402 W. Washington St. Rm. W472  
Indianapolis, IN 46204  
Voice: 317-232-3380  
Fax: 317-233-1713

**Records Management Division,  
Records Analysts**  
Larry Hummel 317-232-3658  
Amy Robinson 317-232-3285

**State Records Center**  
6400 E. 30th St.  
Indianapolis, IN 46219  
Voice: 317-591-5325  
Fax: 317-591-5328

**A Guide to Proper Records Destruction**

**Indiana Commission on Public Records**